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**Naabik'iyátí' Committee tables legislation seeking to
amend the Nation's Criminal Code to strengthen sentencing provisions**

Work session to be held on August 8 to address the legislation

WINDOW ROCK – With a vote of 7-5, Naabik'iyátí' Committee members on Thursday tabled Legislation No. 0161-14, which seeks to amend sentencing provisions within Title 17 of the Navajo Nation Code.

Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), sponsor of the legislation, said the proposed amendments are necessary to address crimes on the Navajo Nation that are not addressed under current laws.

For example, if a person commits a drive-by shooting current laws do not provide for penalties and the person is often released from custody within hours of the incident, according to Delegate Shepherd, a former law enforcement officer.

In 2000, the Navajo Nation Council eliminated jail terms and fines for a number of offenses in part because the Nation had limited resources to prosecute and jail criminal offenders.

In July 2012, the Navajo Nation Council's Law and Order Committee established the Title 17 Sentencing Provision Review Task Force, to review the current sentencing provisions and to provide recommendations to strengthen existing laws.

Since then, the task force has held a total of five public hearings across the Navajo Nation and conducted a radio call-in forum to seek public input and recommendations.

The perception of the public is that the Navajo Nation has been "too soft on crime," and that the current sentences are inadequate justice for victims of crimes, according to a written report provided by the task force.

During Thursday's discussion, a number of concerns were raised by committee members including Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake), who recommended that a comprehensive approach be taken to address crime on the Navajo Nation.

Delegate Tsosie issued several suggestions including stationing officials from the Federal Bureau of Investigation in each of the Nation's five agencies, increasing the use of security cameras, and reallocating funds to create additional police sub-stations.

Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau), chair of the Law and Order Committee and former law enforcement officer,

recommended that each committee member take a “ride-along” with law enforcement officers to gain a better perspective of criminal activity occurring on the Navajo Nation.

Delegate Yazzie also noted that illegal drug activity is becoming more common because non-Navajos take advantage of inadequate penalties for drug offenses.

Following the discussion, committee members tabled the legislation pending a work session—tentatively scheduled for August 8, beginning at 10:00 a.m. in Window Rock— to address concerns and recommendations.

To view more information regarding the proposed changes to the Navajo Nation Criminal Code and sentencing provisions, please visit:

<http://www.navajonationcouncil.org/pressReleases/2014/JUL/Title17TaskForcePresentationforPublicHearings.pdf>

At the conclusion of Thursday’s Naabik’iyátí’ Committee, the following delegates answered roll-call: Speaker Pro Tem LoRenzo Bates, George Apachito, Russell Begaye, Katherine Benally, Charles Damon, II, Jonathan Hale, Jonathan Nez, Alton Joe Shepherd, Danny Simpson, Roscoe Smith, and Leonard Tsosie.

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